

STRETCHABLE BELT WITH VISUAL SYMBOL

Field of the Invention

The field of this invention is belts, and more particularly, stretchable belts.

Background of the Invention and Discussion of the Prior Art

For certain clothing, belts assume particular importance. The most common article of clothing for which belts are used is pants. The traditional belt is selected based on the size of the waist of the individual wearer and the style of belt that matches the pants. A number of problems exist with respect to use of a belt. For one thing, traditional belts do not cover in-between sizes well. In general, belts come in discrete sizes rather than in a continuum of sizes. But people's needs for belt comes in a continuum of sizes since a person's waist or hips can be any size. What is needed is a belt that can accommodate a continuum of sizes.

In addition, belts are not designed to take into consideration changes in the size and shape of a person that occur during the useful life of the belt. For example, many individuals who diet or for any other reason fluctuate in weight find that the change in weight necessitates purchasing a new belt of a different size. Women in particular due to their female physiology, fluctuate in weight and size repeatedly over relatively short and medium lengths of time. When weight changes, a belt that previously held up one's pair of pants perfectly suddenly is not the right belt.

In addition, different styles of pants are worn at different heights along a person's waist or hips. Each height at which the different pants are worn normally requires a different size belt. Only sometimes can that variation be accommodated by adjusting an existing belt. If the size of the waist or hips happens to be in-between the sizes available on the belt, or the size is too big or too small for the belt the wearer already owns, a new belt must be purchased. Moreover, certain

styles that have increased significantly in popularity highlight a further problem with traditional belts. For example, a style that has become fashionable recently is wearing pants that are low-rise waist pants. Among men, these pants are especially popular among urban minority youth. These pants are deliberately worn by boys so that they look like they are about to fall down. Part of the wearer's undergarments are visible, although control is maintained over how much. In addition, a popular style recently among women's pants is low-rise pants that are worn essentially down to the woman's hips. Any belt for these pants is worn well below the waist and much closer to the hips. With respect to these low-rise style of pants the belt is important since the margin of error before undergarments are inadvertently exposed is small.

Furthermore, pants naturally shift along the waist and hips of a wearer upward or downward. Belts should ideally be able to automatically adjust to these sudden shifts without requiring a manual adjustment of the belt by the wearer. At the very least, belts should be able to hold the pants up at the new height comfortably with or without adjustment.

What is needed is a belt that gives the wearer more control over placement of the belt at varying heights, a belt that fits any size among a continuum of sizes comfortably and that automatically adjusts itself to accommodate the normal shifting of pants up and down a person's torso. Such a belt should not require a manual adjustment of the belt when varying the height of the pants along the torso. There is a further need for a belt of this kind that also has visually appealing characteristics in that the belt can accommodate visual symbols in an aesthetically appealing manner without the need to add something to the belt.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

An aesthetically interesting stretchable belt can be worn at varying heights along a

person's torso and is particularly appropriate for individuals who fluctuate in weight and for those who wear the modern low-rise style pants. The preferred embodiment of the belt wraps around once plus an extension overlap for extra hugging of the hips. An alternative embodiment wraps around the wearer twice. The belt includes a visual symbol made of holes that also increase elasticity.

IMPORTANT OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

The following important objects and advantages of the present invention are:

- (1) to provide a belt that can accommodate a continuum of sizes;
- (2) to provide an elastic belt that is suitable for individuals who fluctuate in weight;
- (3) to provide an elastic belt that is aesthetically appealing;
- (4) to provide an elastic belt that can be worn and that fits equally well at different heights along a person's torso between the hips and the waist because it automatically stretches to fit the necessary size;
- (5) to provide an elastic belt that is specifically suited for low rise pants;
- (6) to provide a belt that automatically adjusts its length if and when the pants that the belt is holding up happens to shift up or down a person's body;
- (7) to provide a belt that prevents embarrassing disclosure of undergarments in situations where low rise pants shift on the wearer's body;
- (8) to provide a belt that has an extension layer for extra gripping capability;
- (9) to provide a belt which in an alternative embodiment has a double layer of an elastic strip of rubber;
- (10) to provide a belt in which the elasticity of the belt is magnified by the presence of a

plurality of holes running through the entire thickness of the belt from the first to the second side surfaces;

(11) to provide such a belt in which the holes also play a second role in that they display a visual symbol such as a logo;

(12) to provide a belt that can incorporate a visual symbol in an aesthetically appealing manner in a belt without having to add anything to the belt;

(13) to provide a belt that is suitable for in-between sizes not normally covered by traditional belts;

(14) to provide a belt that can convert a desirable pair of pants that does not fit around the waist into a pair of pants that does fit around the waist; and

(15) to provide a belt that affords its wearer greater control over the hem of the pants by controlling the waist; and

(16) to provide a belt that allows automatic adjustment of the height of the pants without having to reset the belt by putting one end of the belt buckle into a different hole on the belt.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a side view of the belt of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a top view of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a side view of a double wrap belt of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a top view of FIG. 3;

FIG. 5 is an enlarged fragmentary side view of the belt of the present invention in normal condition;

FIG. 6 is an enlarged fragmentary view of the belt of the present invention in stretched

condition;

FIG. 7 is an enlarged fragmentary view of the belt of the present invention in an area of a single large hole in normal condition;

FIG. 8 is an enlarged fragmentary view of the belt of the present invention in an area of a single large hole in stretched condition; and

FIGS. 9 and 10 illustrate the belt of the present invention along different heights of a wearer's torso.

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of the belt of the present invention in fastened condition and showing the overlapping layer of elastic strip of rubber.

FIG. 12 is a perspective view of the alternative embodiment of the belt of the present invention shown in FIGS. 3 and 4 in fastened condition showing the double layer of elastic strip of rubber.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The apparatus of the present invention will now be illustrated by reference to the accompanying drawings. The belt of the present invention has been assigned reference numeral 10. Other elements have been assigned the reference numerals referred to below.

Belt 10 is designed to be worn on a range of heights along a person's physique and in particular between approximately a person's hips and approximately the person's waist. FIG. 9 and FIG. 10 generically illustrate two different placements of belt 10 on a person's body. Since belt 10 is elastic, even though the wearer's hips are wider than the wearer's waist, for example, or even though one portion of the hips is wider than another portion, belt 10 fits at either location since it automatically stretches to fit the required size.

The preferred embodiment of belt 10 is shown in FIGS. 1-2 and 5-10. As seen from these figures, belt 10 comprises a longitudinally elastic strip 11 of rubber having a first end 12 and a second end 14 and having a substantially planar first surface 20 and a substantially planar second surface 22. The belt 10 has well known fastener means such as ordinary snaps made of male and female fasteners, or the belt 10 has other well known fastening structure.

For example, belt 10 has male and female fastener components including a first male fastener component 32 on the first surface 20 located at the first end 12 of belt 10 and a second male fastener component 34 on the first surface 20 located at a certain distance from the first end of belt 10. The distance is typically less than half the length of the belt 10 and may be approximately one quarter of the length of the belt. Preferably the distance is at least approximately four inches long. Purely by way of example, the first male fastener component 32 can be a series of two to four equidistantly spaced male fasteners 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d and the fasteners 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d can be snap members. The second male fastener component 34 would preferably be the same kind of fastener as the first male fastener component 32, i.e. snap members. The term "first male fastener component", "second male fastener component", "first female fastener component" and "second female fastener component", refer to collections of or groupings of snap members or other fastener members as the case may be. The number of snap members or other fastener members (i.e. hook and loop) in each grouping or fastener component may vary and still be within the spirit of the present invention.

It should be noted that when describing a male or female fastener components as being on a first or second surface this refers to the active portion of such components. If the fastener component is a snap, for example, there may be an inactive component on the opposite surface.

Further, a first female fastener component 42 on the second surface 22 of belt 10 is located at the second end 14 and a second female fastener component 44 on the second surface 22 is located at approximately the same distance from the second end 14 that separates first and second male fastener components 32, 34. By "approximately" is means that at least some fastener 42a, 42b of first female fastener component 44 should be the same distance. Taking the same example as above using snaps, the first female fastener component 42 can be a series of equidistantly spaced female fasteners 42a, 42b and the fasteners can be snap members that mate with the male snap members. Any male fastener can mate with any female snap member although the actual mating may be dictated by the location of the fasteners.

Rubber, whether natural or artificial, is the preferred material for elastic strip 11 due to the fact that it permits elastic strip 11 to stretch sufficiently to accommodate the differences in circumference at different heights along a person's torso in the hip to waist area. In addition, rubber has the necessary resilience to recover from the stretched position back to its original shape and size for present use in the original size and shape as well as for future stretching. In addition, rubber has the strength and durability to provide a belt that is long lasting and that can endure the wear and tear from use. Furthermore, rubber has the aesthetic advantage in that it is smooth and comes in thicknesses that have sufficient three-dimensionality to appeal to the consumer wearing the belt.

Although in a preferred embodiment elastic strip 11 is made of natural or artificial rubber, in an alternative embodiment elastic strip 11 may be made of any stretchable material that springs back to its original shape when the stretching is finished and that has the other desirable features suitable for belts, i.e. that is comfortable against a person's body, that is not too heavy and that is

inexpensive to manufacture and shape..

It is noted that FIG. 1 is a side view of belt 10 from only one side. Hence, only the rear view of first female fastener component 42 and of second female fastener component 44 are visible. The front view of these fastener components 42, 44 which depicts the portion that receives the male fastener components, are on the other side not shown by FIG. 1 are shown in the top view of FIG. 2.

As stated, the distance between the first and second male fastener components 32, 34 is roughly the same as the distance between the first and second female fastener components 42, 44. The distance is sufficient to create an overlapping layer 50 of elastic strip, in other words, a double thickness 50 of elastic strip, between the first and the second male fastener components 32, 34 (and between the first and second female fastener components 42, 44) when the first male fastener component 32 mates with the second female fastener component 44 and when the second male fastener component 34 mates with the first female fastener component 42. This overlapping layer 50 serves to enhance the gripping action of the portion of the torso of the wearer that the belt 10 is on. This occurs because when belt 10 is worn against the body, each of the two layers of strips of rubber that constitute overlapping layer 50 tend to separate from one another vertically, at least slightly, thereby causing a wider amount of rubber to grip the person's body. The overlapping layer 50 can also be manually adjusted to separate one layer from the other and thereby create a wider amount of rubber to grip the person's body.

In an alternative embodiment, the present invention also contemplates a belt 10 without an overlapping layer, in which case belt 10 would only need to have a single male fastener component and a single female fastener component. It would not be necessary to have a second

male or female fastener component.

Another important feature of the present invention is that belt 10 can incorporate a visual symbol into the belt 10 without having to add anything to the belt. Furthermore, belt 10 can do this in a visually appealing way. As seen in FIGS. 1 and 5, belt 10 creates an aesthetically appealing appearance by the inclusion of a visual symbol 70 such as a logo on the outer surface of the belt 10. In order to accomplish the belt 10 of the present invention makes dual use of holes running through the thickness of the belt to both increase elasticity and simultaneously generate a visual pattern that displays a logo or other visual symbol 70.

A plurality of small holes 60 run through a thickness of the elastic strip 11 from the first surface 20 to the second surface 22 and a plurality of large holes 66 likewise run through a thickness of the elastic strip 11 from the first surface 20 to the second surface 22. While the first purpose of the small holes 60 and the large holes 66 is to increase the elasticity of the elastic strip, these holes also create a visual symbol in an aesthetically appealing way without having to add anything to the belt. For example, the pattern of large holes 66 collectively form a design representing a visual symbol, such as letters of a word or a picture that represents a logo of some kind. As best seen in FIGS. 5 and 6, the small holes 60 intermingle with the large holes, that is they are interspersed between the large holes 66. Small holes 60 thus form a visual background for the large holes 66. This visual background renders the visual symbol harder to notice and harder to discern since the symbol is defined by the collection of holes set against an ordinary smooth background of rubber having no holes. The presence of the small holes 60 near large holes 66 deliberately masks the relationship between the small holes 60 and its background and thereby makes the symbol harder to notice, and if noticed, harder to discern.. This subtlety of the

visual symbol represents an interesting artistic effect and thus creates an aesthetically appealing appearance. As an added option, the visual symbol may be located on the overlapping layer 50 of elastic strip.

In general in all embodiments the individual holes of small holes 60 and the individual holes of large holes 66 are sufficiently uniform so as to be interpreted by a human looking at said holes to be part of a visual pattern forming visual symbol 70. That degree of uniformity shall be called "substantially uniform".

The term "small holes" 60 and the term "large holes" 66 are intended to mean that one group of holes is sufficiently larger than the other group of holes to differentiate one from the other and create the necessary visual effect. Furthermore, the present invention contemplates that the small holes 60 and the large holes 66 can be of any size so long as elasticity is increased by their presence and so long as enough of the holes can be fitted onto a surface of the belt 10 to create a visual symbol, such as a word, from the collection of said holes.

In an alternative embodiment, there can be small holes 60 forming visual symbol 70 without the large holes 66 as a background or there could be large holes 66 forming the visual symbol 70 without small holes 60. That is not as aesthetically appealing as the preferred embodiment but it is still aesthetically appealing.

Due to the stretching ability of the elastic strip 11 of rubber, elastic strip 11 of rubber is capable of being worn at varying locations between a waist and a hips of the wearer. When the wearer wishes to move his or her pants up or down he or she just shifts the pants and the elastic belt 10 adjusts itself automatically. Likewise, whenever a pair of pants happens to shift up or down the hips or waist of a person, thus gripping a smaller or larger circumference of the person's

body, the belt 10 accommodates the shift by automatically stretching more or less.

In a preferred embodiment, the first male fastener component 32 has a plurality of first male fasteners 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d and likewise the second male fastener component 34 has a plurality of second male fasteners 34a, 34b, 34c, 34d. The defined distance between each fastener in the plurality of first male fasteners 32 equals the defined distance between each fastener in the plurality of second male fasteners. This simply allows for adjustability of the belt for different sizes. In this regard, any male fastener should preferably be able to mate with any female fastener. Thus, although belt 10 stretches, it is still advantageous to have adjustment for different sizes. The fact that rubber strip 11 is elastic accommodates the sizes that are in-between the defined sizes dictated by the location of the fastener members.

Double Wrap Embodiment

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, the belt 10 has a double layer throughout the entire circumference of the belt 10. FIGS. 3 and 4 depict a side and top view of such a belt. Double wrap belt 10a shown in FIGS. 3-4 is longer than the belt 10 depicted in the preferred embodiment of FIGS. 1-2 and 5-10. Accordingly, if making the double wrap from the "open, laid out" position of FIG. 3, second end 12 of belt 10a would be made to wrap around itself almost one complete revolution prior to being fastened near first end 12. The belt 10a is long enough and the arrangement of the male and female fastener components is also such as to allow creation of double layer of elastic strip 99 along almost a complete revolution of belt 10a when the first male fastener component 32 mates with the second female fastener component 44 after looping around the elastic strip 11 and when the second male fastener component 34 mates with the first female fastener component 42, thus creating an overlapping layer of elastic strip at

almost the full revolution of the elastic strip 11a that further enhances gripping action of a torso of a wearer by the belt 10a.

The point is that the distance between first and second male fastener components 32, 34 and the distance between first and second female fastener components 42, 44 is maximized by placing the second male fastener component 34 and second female fastener components 44 toward the middle of the length of belt 10a and is further maximized by maintaining first male fastener components 32 and first female fastener component 42 near the respective first end 12 and second end 14a of belt 10a. Furthermore, maintaining first male fastener components 32 and first female fastener component 42 near the respective first end 12 and second end 14a of belt 10a also serves to avoid having elastic strips of rubber in belt 10a hanging at the ends. By maximizing the distance between the distance between first and second male fastener components 32, 34 and the distance between first and second female fastener components 42, 44, a wearer can then separate the two parts of the double layer 99 of elastic strip along a significantly large length of belt 10a to create the effect of the extra gripping against the body of the wearer. The wearer can do so at two areas - the area between the first and second male fastener components 32, 34 or the area between the first and second female fastener components 42, 44, or both.

As is the case in the preferred embodiment, in this alternative embodiment also the distance between the first and second male fastener components 32, 34 is roughly equal to the distance between the first and second female fastener components 42, 44.

Although FIGS. 5-10 are primarily depicting the preferred embodiment of FIGS. 1-2, these figures can just as well be said to be depicting the alternative embodiment as to the preferred embodiment. For examples, the holes 60, 66 are the same for either embodiment.. Furthermore,

although FIGS. 9 and 10 appear to represent different torsos or different individuals in fact they are intended to represent the same person on the same day wearing at his or her option the belt 10 of the present invention at different locations.

It is to be understood that while the apparatus of this invention have been described and illustrated in detail, the above-described embodiments are simply illustrative of the principles of the invention. It is to be understood also that various other modifications and changes may be devised by those skilled in the art which will embody the principles of the invention and fall within the spirit and scope thereof. It is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation shown and described. The spirit and scope of this invention are limited only by the spirit and scope of the following claims.